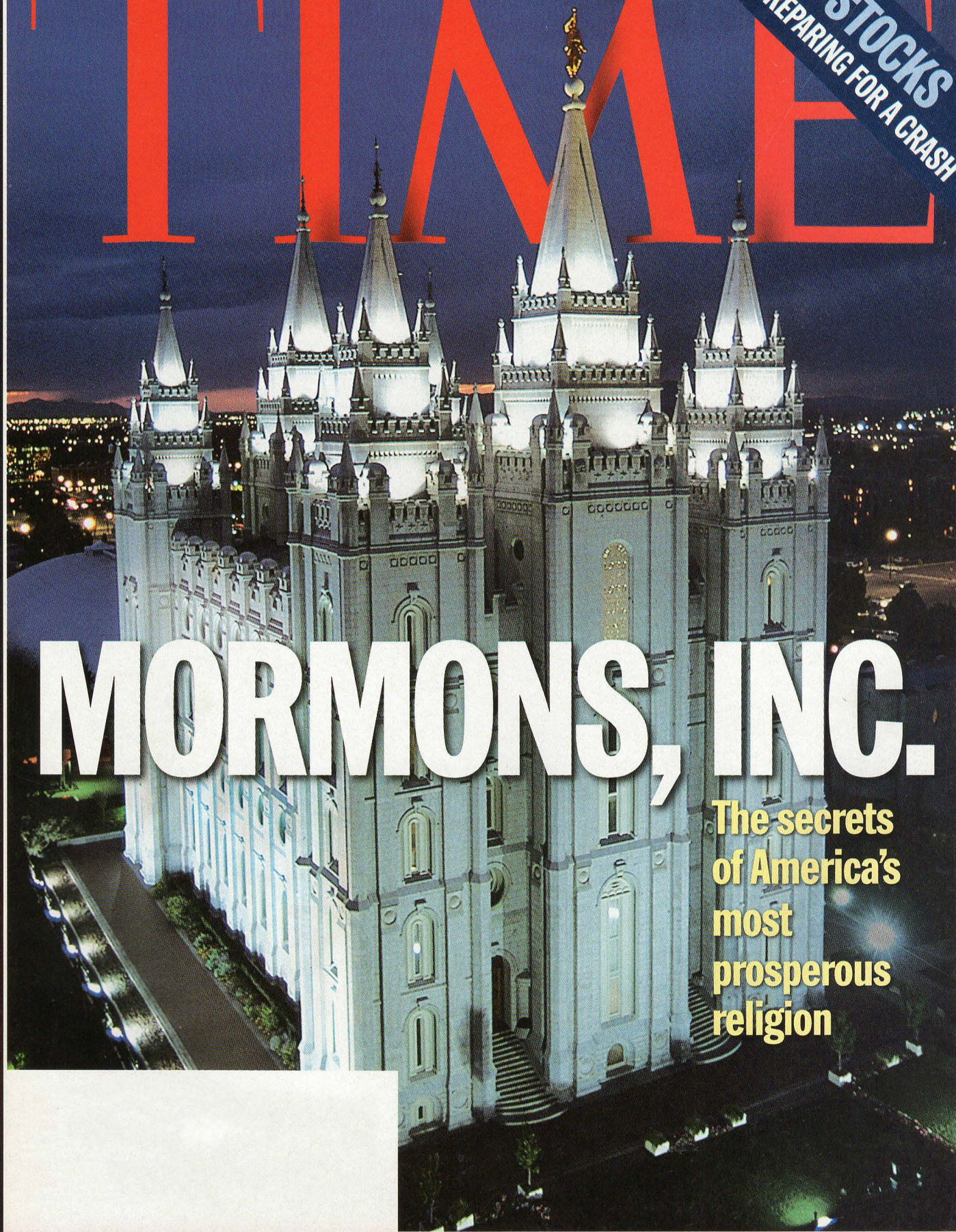


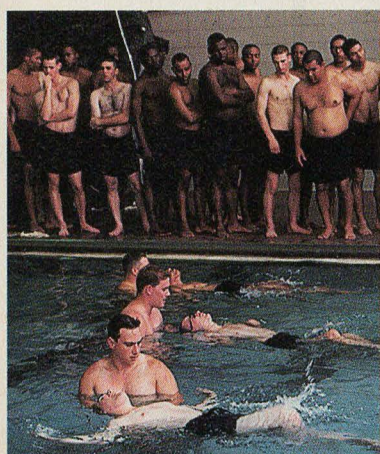
TIME

STOCKS
PREPARING FOR A CRASH

MORMONS, INC.

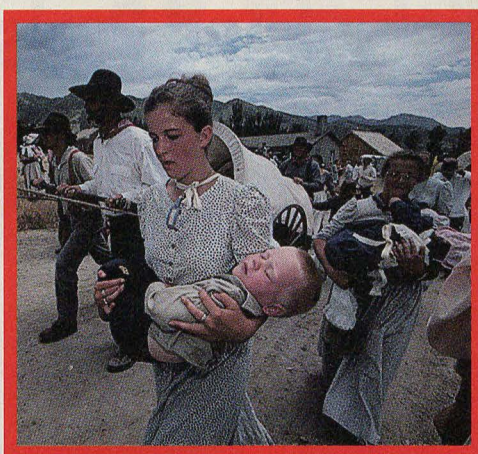
The secrets
of America's
most
prosperous
religion





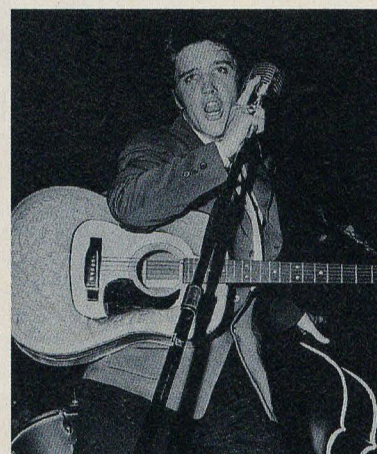
RALF FINN HESTOFT—SABA FOR TIME

Military: Are recruits developing a soft underbelly? (see NATION)



PAUL CHESLEY FOR TIME

Religion: The clean-cut optimism of the Mormons is increasingly in demand (see COVER)



CHARLES TRAINO

Show Business: Elvis Enterprises guards the legend (see THE ARTS)

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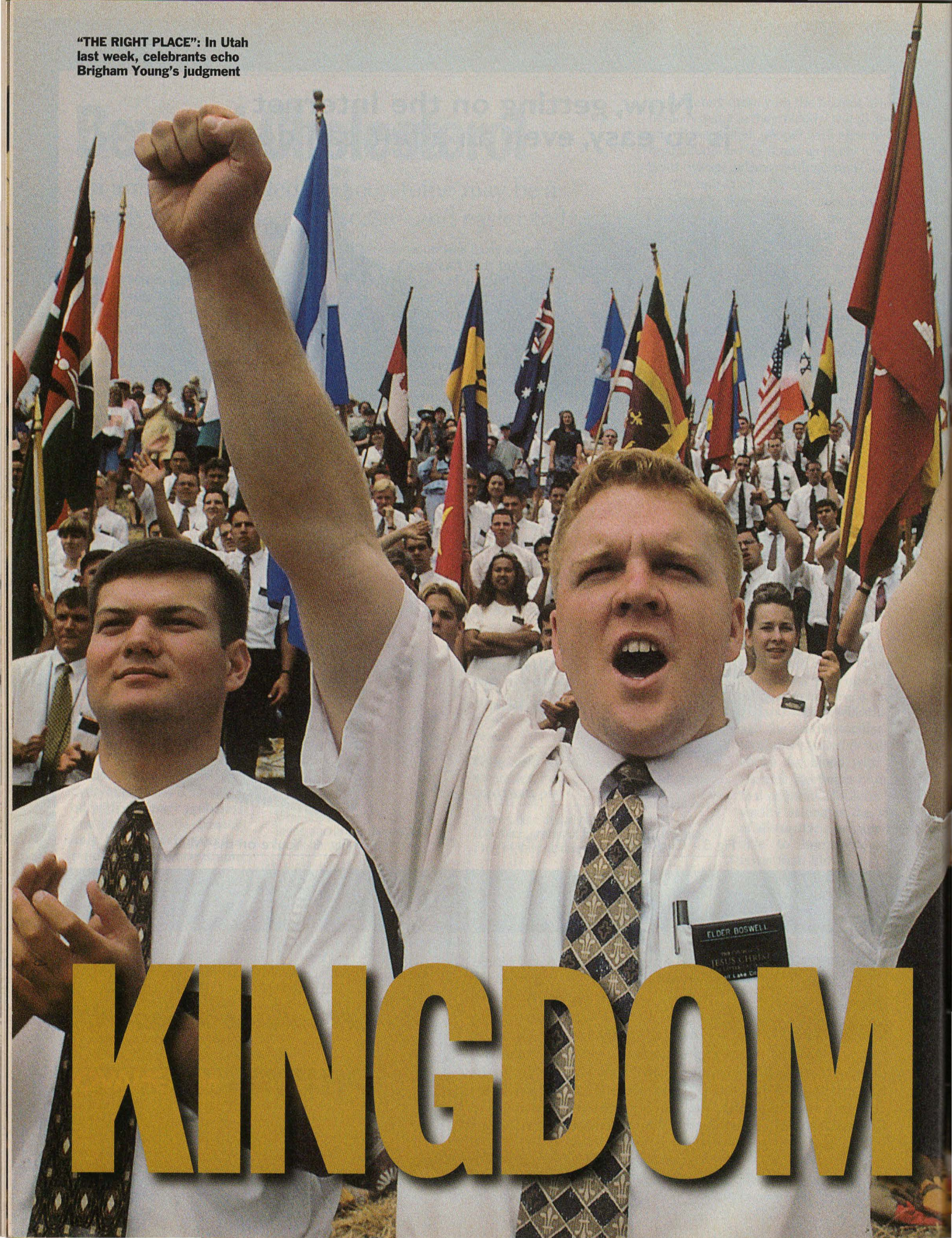
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COVER: *Salt Lake Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, chief spiritual symbol of the Mormons, Salt Lake City. Photograph by Acey Harper*

"THE RIGHT PLACE": In Utah last week, celebrants echo Brigham Young's judgment



KINGDOM

RELIGION

Salt Lake City was just for starters—the Mormons' true Great Trek has been to social acceptance and a \$30 billion church empire

By DAVID VAN BIEMA

IN SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, ON A block known informally as Welfare Square, stands a 15-barreled silo filled with wheat: 19 million lbs., enough to feed a small city for six months. At the foot of the silo stands a man—a bishop with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—trying to explain why the wheat must not be moved, sold or given away.

Around the corner is something called the bishop's storehouse. It is filled with goods whose sole purpose is to be given away. On its shelves, Deseret-brand laundry soaps manufactured by the Mormon Church nestle next to Deseret-brand canned peaches from the Mormon cannery in Boise, Idaho. Nearby are Deseret tuna from the church's plant in San Diego, beans from its farms in Idaho, Deseret peanut butter and Deseret pudding. There is no mystery to these goods: they are all part of the huge Mormon welfare system, perhaps the largest nonpublic venture of its kind in the country. They will be taken away by grateful recipients, replaced, and the replacements will be taken away.

But the grain in the silo goes nowhere. The bishop, whose name is Kevin Nield, is trying to explain why. "It's a reserve," he is saying. "In case there is a time of need."

What sort of time of need?

Photograph for TIME by Les Stone—Sygma



COME

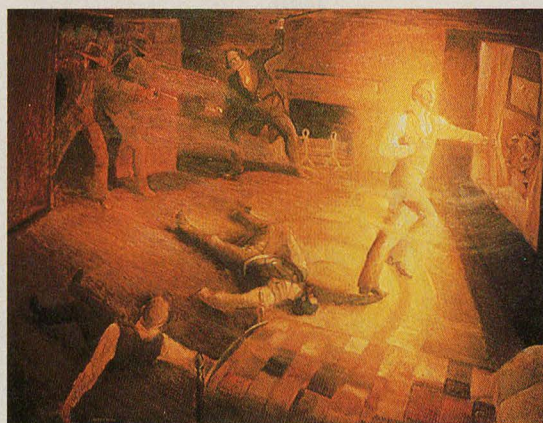
THE GRANGER COLLECTION



A MORMON MARCH THROUGH HISTORY

IN THE BEGINNING
Mormons believe Joseph Smith received Scriptures from an angel in 1823 and was later granted apostolic authority; he founded his church in 1830

AN UNWILLING MARTYR
“Dear Emma, I am very much resigned to my lot,” Smith wrote his wife from prison before a mob killed him and his brother. But he shot and wounded three of them



LDS CHURCH



“Oh, if things got bad enough so that the normal systems of distribution didn’t work.” Huh? “The point is, if those other systems broke down, the church would still be able to care for the poor and needy.”

What he means, although he won’t come out and say it, is that although the grain might be broken out in case of a truly bad recession, its root purpose is as a reserve to tide people over in the tough days just before the Second Coming.

“Of course,” says the bishop, “we rotate it every once in a while.”

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, THE MEMBERS of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints suffered because their vision of themselves and the universe was different from those of the people around them. Their tormentors portrayed them as a nation within a nation, radical communalists who threatened the economic order and polygamists out to destroy the American family. Attacked in print, and physically by mobs, some 30,000 were forced to flee their dream city of Nauvoo, Ill., in 1846. Led by their assassinated founder’s successor, they set out on a thousand-mile trek westward derided by nonbelievers as being as absurd as their faith.

This year their circumstances could not be more changed. Last Tuesday, 150 years to the week after their forefathers, 200 exultant and sunburned Latter-day Saints

reached Salt Lake City, having re-enacted the grueling great trek. Their arrival at the spot where, according to legend, Brigham Young announced, “This is the right place” was cheered in person by a crowd of 50,000—and observed approvingly by millions. The copious and burnished national media attention merely ratified a long-standing truth: that although the Mormon faith remains unique, the land in which it was born has come to accept—no, to lionize—its adherents as paragons of the national spirit. It was in the 1950s, says historian Jan Shipp, that the Mormons went from being “vilified” to being “venerated,” and their combination of family orientation, clean-cut optimism, honesty and pleasant aggressiveness seems increasingly in demand. Fifteen Mormon Senators and Representatives currently trek the halls of Congress. Mormon author and consultant Stephen R. Covey bottled parts of the ethos in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, which has been on best-seller lists for five years. The FBI and CIA, drawn by a seemingly incorruptible rectitude, have instituted Mormon-recruitment plans.

The Mormon Church is by far the most numerically successful creed born on American soil and one of the fastest growing anywhere. Its U.S. membership of 4.8 million is the seventh largest in the country, while its hefty 4.7% annual American growth rate is

nearly doubled abroad, where there are already 4.9 million adherents. Gordon B. Hinckley, the church’s President—and its current Prophet—is engaged in massive foreign construction, spending billions to erect 350 church-size meetinghouses a year and adding 15 cathedral-size temples to the existing 50. University of Washington sociologist Rodney Stark projects that in about 83 years, worldwide Mormon membership should reach 260 million.

The church’s material triumphs rival even its evangelical advances. With unusual cooperation from the Latter-day Saints hierarchy (which provided some financial figures and a rare look at church businesses), *TIME* has been able to quantify the church’s extraordinary financial vibrancy. Its current assets total a minimum of \$30 billion. If it were a corporation, its estimated \$5.9 billion in annual gross income would place it midway through the *FORTUNE* 500, a little below Union Carbide and the Paine Webber Group but bigger than Nike and the Gap. And as long as corporate rankings are being bandied about, the church would make any list of the most admired: for straight dealing, company spirit, contributions to charity (even the non-Mormon kind) and a fiscal probity among its powerful leaders that would satisfy any shareholder group, if there were one.

Yet the Latter-day Saints remain sensitive about their “otherness”—more so, in

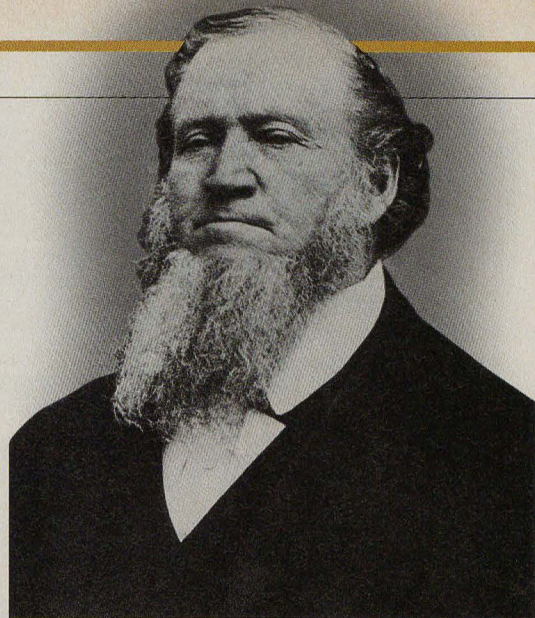
“Our whole objective is to make bad men good and good men better.”



BETTMANN ARCHIVES

THE NEW FOLKS
After reaching Utah, Brigham Young met with Ute leaders. He would write that it was "more economical ... to feed and clothe [native tribes] than to fight them"

OLD-TIME POLYGAMY
Young is thought to have had 27 wives and to have entered into ceremonies of eternal "sealing" with twice as many, as well as 150 women posthumously



CULVER PICTURES



fact, than most outsiders can imagine. Most church members laughed off Dennis Rodman's crack about "f_____ Mormons" during the N.B.A. championships. But the subsequent quasi apology by Rodman's coach Phil Jackson that his player hadn't known they were "some kind of a cult or sect" deeply upset both hierarchy and membership. Perhaps, however, they should learn to relax. Historian Leonard J. Arrington says the church, along with the values it represents, "has played a role, and continues to play a role, in the economic and social development of the West—and indeed, because of the spread of Mormons everywhere, of the nation as a whole." And in a country where religious unanimity is ever less important but material achievement remains the earthly manifestation of virtue, their creed may never face rejection again.

THE TOP BEEF RANCH IN THE WORLD IS NOT the King Ranch in Texas. It is the Deseret Cattle & Citrus Ranch outside Orlando, Fla. It covers 312,000 acres; its value as real estate alone is estimated at \$858 million. It is owned entirely by the Mormons. The largest producer of nuts in America, AgReserves, Inc., in Salt Lake City, is Mormon-owned. So are the Bonneville International Corp., the country's 14th largest radio chain, and the Beneficial Life Insurance Co., with assets of \$1.6 billion. There

are richer churches than the one based in Salt Lake City: Roman Catholic holdings dwarf Mormon wealth. But the Catholic Church has 45 times as many members. There is no major church in the U.S. as active as the Latter-day Saints in economic life, nor, per capita, as successful at it.

The first divergence between Mormon economics and that of other denominations is the tithe. Most churches take in the greater part of their income through donations. Very few, however, impose a compulsory 10% income tax on their members. Tithes are collected locally, with much of the money passed on informally to local lay leaders at Sunday services. "By Monday," says Elbert Peck, editor of *Sunstone*, an independent Mormon magazine, the church authorities in Salt Lake City "know every cent that's been collected and have made sure the money is deposited in banks." There is a lot to deposit. Last year \$5.2 billion in tithes flowed into Salt Lake City, \$4.9 billion of which came from American Mormons. By contrast, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, with a comparable U.S. membership, receives \$1.7 billion a year in contributions. So great is the tithe flow that scholars have suggested it constitutes practically the intermountain states' only local counterbalance in an economy otherwise dominated by capital from the East and West coasts.

The true Mormon difference, however, lies in what the LDS church does with that money. Most denominations spend on staff, charity and the building and maintenance of churches; leaders will invest a certain amount—in the case of the Evangelical Lutherans, \$152 million—as a pension fund, usually through mutual funds or a conservative stock portfolio. The philosophy is minimalist, as Lutheran pastor Mark Moller-Gunderson explains: "Our stewardship is not such that we grow the church through business ventures."

The Mormons are stewards of a different stripe. Their charitable spending and temple building are prodigious. But where other churches spend most of what they receive in a given year, the Latter-day Saints employ vast amounts of money in investments that *TIME* estimates to be at least \$6 billion strong. Even more unusual, most of this money is not in bonds or stock in other peoples' companies but is invested directly in church-owned, for-profit concerns, the largest of which are in agribusiness, media, insurance, travel and real estate. Deseret Management Corp., the company through which the church holds almost all its commercial assets, is one of the largest owners of farm- and ranchland in the country, including 49 for-profit parcels in addition to the Deseret Ranch. Besides the Bonneville International chain and Beneficial Life, the

CULVER PICTURES

ter, to give them an understanding of their godly inheritance."

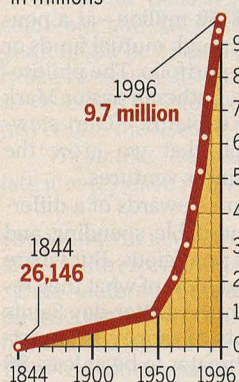


FAR FROM SALT LAKE The Mormon church owns the largest cattle operation in the country, with 312,000 acres outside Orlando, Fla.

THEY'RE GROWING ...

Membership

In millions



church owns a 52% holding in ZCMI, Utah's largest department-store chain. (For a more complete list, see chart.) All told, TIME estimates that the Latter-day Saints farmland and financial investments total some \$11 billion, and that the church's nontithe income from its investments exceeds \$600 million.

The explanation for this policy of ecclesiastical entrepreneurship lies partly in the Mormons' early experience of ostracism. Brigham Young wrote 150 years ago that "the kingdom of God cannot rise independent of Gentile nations until we produce, manufacture, and make every article of use, convenience or necessity among our people." By the time the covered wagons and

...AND THEY'RE RICH

Agribusiness

AgReserves and **AgriNorthwest** manage 50 for-profit farms and ranches across the country, including the **Deseret Ranch** outside Orlando, Fla., the top beef ranch in the U.S. The land alone is worth **\$858 million**. The church also owns 100 properties through its welfare system.

Real estate

The **Hotel Temple Square Co.** owns much of the real estate around the headquarters in downtown Salt Lake City. Their **Polynesian Cultural Center** is Hawaii's No. 1 paid visitor attraction, with annual revenues of at least **\$40 million**. Other holdings include 11,571 meetinghouses and 50 temples around the world.

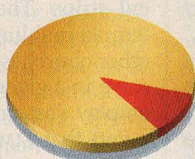
Media

The church owns 16 radio stations and one TV station. 1996 sales: **\$172 million**. **Deseret News** circulation: 65,000. **Deseret Book Co.** owns a chain of about 30 bookstores in Utah.

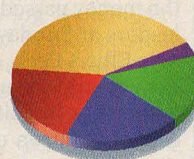
Colleges

BYU, in Provo, Hawaii and Jerusalem, **L.D.S. Business** and **Ricks** in Idaho.

Annual income: \$5.9 billion (est.)



Assets: \$30 billion



U.S. meetinghouses and temples: **\$12 billion**
 Foreign meetinghouses and temples: **\$6 billion**
 Investments: **\$6 billion**
 Ranch and farm real estate: **\$5 billion**
 Schools, etc.: **\$1 billion**

TIME Chart by Steve Conley

handcarts had concluded their westward roll, geographic isolation had reinforced social exclusion: the Mormons' camp on the Great Salt Lake was 800 miles from the nearest settlement. Says Senator Bob Bennett, whose grandfather was a President: "In Young's day the church was the only source of accumulated capital in the territory. If anything was built, it had to be built by the church because no one else had any money."

In the first century of corporate Mormonism, the church's leaders were partners, officers or directors in more than 900 Utah-area businesses. They owned woolen mills, cotton factories, 500 local co-ops, 150 stores and 200 miles of railroad. Moreover,

when occasionally faced with competition, they insisted that church members patronize LDS-owned businesses. Eventually this became too much for the U.S. Congress. In 1887 it passed the Edmunds-Tucker Act, specifically to smash the Mormons' vertical monopolies.

But there is an additional aspect to the Mormons' spectacular industry and frugality. Their faith, like several varieties of American Protestantism, holds that Jesus will return to earth and begin a thousand-year rule, this glory preceded by a period of turmoil and chaos. During the dark years, church members understand that it is their destiny to sustain a light to help usher in the

kingdom to come. In their preparations to do so, they shame even the most avid of secular survivalists. Church members are advised to keep one year's food and other supplies on hand at all times, and many do. The wheat-filled Welfare Square grain elevator fulfills the same principle. Of the millennium, President Hinckley says, "We hope we're preparing for it. We hope we'll be prepared when it comes."

But Hinckley qualifies that: "We don't spend a lot of time talking about or dreaming about the millennium to come; we've always been a practical people dealing with the issues of life. We're doing today's job in the best way we know how." From the beginning, the Saints' millennial strain was modulated by a delight in the economic nitty-gritty. Of some 112 revelations received by the first Prophet and President of the church, Joseph Smith, 88 explicitly address fiscal matters. And although the faithful believe the "End Times" could begin shortly, their actual date is (to humankind) indefinite, and certain key signs and portents have not yet manifested themselves. Rather than wild-eyed fervor, most church moneymen project a can-do optimism.

Or, in their higher echelons, a case-hardened if amiable professionalism. A primary reason for the church's business triumphs, says University of Washington sociologist Stark, is that it has no career clerics, only amateurs who have been plucked for service from successful endeavors in other fields. (In fact, there is no ordained clergy whatsoever: the term priest applies to all males over age 12 in good standing in the church, and "bishops," while supervising congregations, are part-time lay leaders.) Religious observers point out that this creates a vacuum of theological talent in a church with a lot of unusual theology to explain. But the benefit, notes Stark, is that "people at the top of the Mormon church have immense experience in the world. These guys have been around the track. Why do they choose to invest directly? Because they are not helpless. They are a bunch of hard-nosed businessmen." Rodney Brady, who runs Deseret Management Corp., has a Harvard business doctorate, served as executive vice president of pharmaceutical giant Bergen Brunswig and from 1970 to '72 was Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Similar figures fill the church's

upper management: Tony Burns, a "stake president" (the rough equivalent of an archbishop), is chairman of Miami-based Ryder Systems, the truck-rental empire.

And then there is Jon Huntsman. Currently a powerful "area authority," Huntsman may at some point make official church fiscal policy. But right now he is exemplary of the Mormon gift for not only making a buck but also spending it on others. An enthusiastic missionary as a young man, at age 42 he was asked to serve as

rendered homeless by the 1988 earthquake, and it is active in smaller charities ranging from children's hospitals to food banks. Since the shift, says Huntsman, "we have a far greater spirit of accomplishment and motivation. Our unity and teamwork and corporate enthusiasm have never been higher." And he still puts in his 15 to 20 hours a week as a lay clergyman. He concludes, "I find it impossible to separate life and corporate involvement from my religious convictions."

And that, of course, begs the question: Just what, exactly, is the belief underlying those convictions, the rock upon which faith and empire are built?

Mormon theology recognizes the Christian Bible but adds three holy books of its own. It holds that shortly after his resurrection, Jesus Christ came to America to teach the indigenous people, who were actually a tribe of Israel, but that Christian churches in the Old World fell into apostasy. Then, starting in 1820, God restored his "latter-day" religion by dispatching the angel Moroni to reveal new Scriptures to a simple farm boy named Joseph Smith near Palmyra, N.Y. Although the original tablets, written in what is called Reformed Egyptian, were taken up again to heaven, Smith, who received visits from God the father, Jesus, John the Baptist and saints Peter, James and John, translated and published the *Book of Mormon* in 1830. He continued to receive divine Scripture and revelations. One of these was that Christ will return to reign on earth and have the headquarters of his kingdom in a Mormon temple in Jackson County, Mo. (Over time, the church has purchased 14,465 acres of land there.)

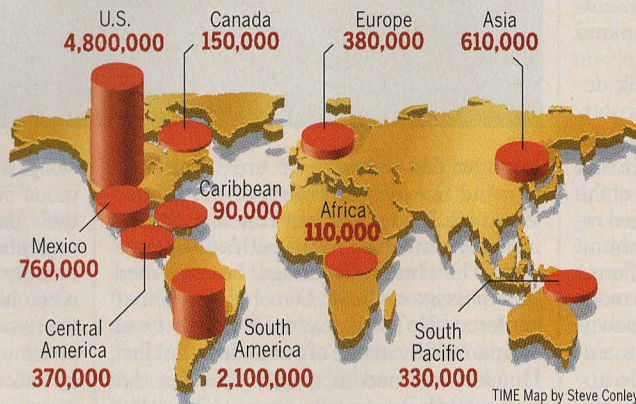
There is a long list of current Mormon practices foreign to Catholic or Protestant believers. The best known revolve around rituals of the temples, which are barred to outsiders. At "endowment" ceremonies, initiates receive the temple garments, which they must wear beneath their clothing for life. Marriages are "sealed," not only until death doth part, but for eternity. And believers conduct proxy baptisms for the dead: to assure non-Mormon ancestors of an opportunity for salvation, current Mormons may be immersed on their behalf. The importance of baptizing one's progenitors has led the Mormons to amass the fullest genealogical record in the world, the microfilmed equivalent



PROPHET AND PRESIDENT Gordon B. Hinckley hails the 150th

WHERE THE SAINTS ARE

Worldwide distribution



"mission president" for a group of 220 young proselytizers in Washington. He took leave from his company and moved his wife and nine children with him. When his stint was up, they headed back to Utah, and Huntsman resumed building the \$5 billion, 10,000-employee Huntsman Chemical Corp., which he owns outright. Ten years ago, Huntsman shifted his company's mission from pure profit to a three-part priority: pay off debt, be a responsible corporate citizen and relieve human suffering. Thus far, his company has donated \$100 million of its profit to a cancer center at the University of Utah. It has also built a concrete plant in Armenia to house those

of 7 million books of 300 pages apiece.

Members of the church celebrate the Lord's Supper with water rather than wine or grape juice. They believe their President is a prophet who receives new revelations from God. These can supplant older revelations, as in the case of the church's historically most controversial doctrine: Smith himself received God's sanctioning of polygamy in 1831, but 49 years later, the church's President announced its rescission. Similarly, an explicit policy barring black men from holding even the lowest church offices was overturned by a new revelation in 1978, opening the way to huge missionary activity in Africa and Brazil.

MORMONS REJECT THE LABEL polytheistic pinned on them by other Christians; they believe that humans deal with only one God. Yet they allow for other deities presiding over other worlds. Smith stated that God was once a humanlike being who had a wife and in fact still has a body of "flesh and bones." Mormons also believe that men, in a process known as deification, may become God-like. Lorenzo Snow, an early President and Prophet, famously aphorized, "As man is now, God once was; as God now is, man may become." Mormonism excludes original sin, whose expiation most Christians understand as Christ's great gift to humankind in dying on the Cross.

All this has led to some withering denominational sniping. In 1995 the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) issued national guidelines stating that the Mormons were not "within the historic apostolic tradition of the Christian Church." A more sharply edged report by the Presbyterians' Utah subunit concluded that the Latter-day Saints "must be regarded as heretical." The Mormons have responded to such challenges by downplaying their differences with the mainstream. In 1982 an additional subtitle appeared on the covers of all editions of the *Book of Mormon*: "Another Testament of Jesus Christ." In 1995 the words Jesus Christ on the official letterhead of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were enlarged until they were three times the size of the rest of the text. In Salt Lake City's Temple Square, the guides' patter, once full of proud references to Smith, is almost entirely Christological. "We talk about Christ a lot more than we used to," says magazine editor Peck, whose journal's outspokenness has earned him an edgy relationship with the church. "We want

to show the converts we are Christians."

And not just the converts. In an interview with TIME, President Hinckley seemed intent on downplaying his faith's distinctiveness. The church's message, he explained, "is a message of Christ. Our church is Christ-centered. He's our leader. He's our head. His name is the name of our church." At first, Hinckley seemed to qualify the idea that men could become gods, suggesting that "it's of course an ideal. It's a hope for a wishful thing," but later affirmed that "yes, of course they can." (He added that women could too, "as companions to their husbands. They can't conceive a king without a queen.") On whether his church still holds that God the Father was once a man, he sounded uncertain, "I don't know that we teach it. I don't know that we emphasize it ... I understand the philosophical background behind it, but I don't know a lot about it, and I don't think others know a lot about it."

It would be tempting to assign the Mormons' success in business to some aspect of their theology. The absence of original sin might be seen as allowing them to move confidently and guiltlessly forward. But it seems more likely that both Mormonism's attractiveness to converts and its fiscal triumphs owe more to what Hinckley terms "sociability," an intensity of common purpose (and, some would add, adherence to authority) uncommon in the non-Mormon business or religious worlds. There is no other major American denomination that officially assigns two congregation members in good standing, as Mormonism does, to visit every household in their flock monthly. Perhaps in consequence, no other denomination can so consistently parade the social virtues most Americans have come around to saying they admire. The Rev. Jeffrey Silliman, of the same Presbyterian group that made the heresy charge, admits that Mormons "have a high moral



“The church needs to recruit labor to drive business growth beyo



INTO THE WORLD: Mormon missionaries at a baptism in the Dominican Republic

ROBIN BOWMAN FROM "THE MISSION" BY EPICENTER COMMUNICATIONS

care for its own disadvantaged members.

"Our whole objective," says Hinckley, "is to make bad men good and good men better, to improve people, to give them an understanding of their godly inheritance and of what they may become." And he intends to do it globally. In what will undoubtedly become the hallmark of his presidency, he is in the process of a grand expansion, the organizational follow-up to the massive missionary work the church has long engaged in overseas. To gather the necessary capital for it, Hinckley has decelerated the growth of Mormon domestic investments: although still on the increase, their pace is far below that of previous decades, and the church has extracted itself from such previously Mormon-heavy fields as banking, hospitals, private schools and sugar. The church authorities have removed the tithe from the authority of local administrators and pulled every penny of it back to Salt Lake City for delegation by a more select and internationally minded group of managers.

No one thinks the push abroad, and the complementary balancing act domestically, will be easy. Says Bradley Bertoch, a venture capitalist (and nonpracticing Mormon) who specializes in attracting money to Utah: "The church needs to recruit adequate labor to drive its business growth beyond the borders of the U.S. But at the same time it has to make sure that it doesn't lose control of the home ground. It's the same problem of resource allocation in new markets faced by any multinational."

Will it succeed? Will the generations of young Mormon men who have so avidly evangelized beyond the borders of their country be followed by a fiscal juggernaut that will make the church as respected a presence in Brazil or the Philippines as it is in Utah, Colorado or, for that matter, America as a whole? Assessing the church's efforts at overseas expansion, author Joel Kotkin has written that "given the scale of the current religious revival combined with the formidable organizational resources of the church, the Mormons could well emerge as the next great global tribe, fulfilling, as they believe, the prophecies of ancient and modern prophets."

Hinckley puts it another way. "We're celebrating this year the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Mormon pioneers," he says. "From that pioneer beginning, in this desert valley where a plow had never before broken the soil, to what you see today... this is a story of success." It would be unwise to bet against more of the same. —**Reported by S.C. Gwynne and Richard N. Ostling/Salt Lake City**

standard on chastity, fidelity, honesty and hard work, and that's appealing."

There are limits to Mormon sociability. In 1993 the church capped a harsh campaign of intellectual purification against dozens of feminists and dissidents with the excommunication of D. Michael Quinn, a leading historian whose painstaking work documented Smith's involvement with the occult and church leaders' misrepresentation of some continued polygamy in the early 1900s. The current crackdown, some analysts believe, stems from fears of loss of control as the church becomes more international. Most think it will get worse if, as is likely, the church's hard-line No. 3 man, Boyd Packer, someday becomes President. Some wonder how the strict Mormon sense of hierarchy, along with the church's male-centered, white-dominated and abstemious nature, will play as the faith continues to spread past the naturally conservative mountain states.

Yet it is hard to argue with Mormon uniformity when a group takes care of its own so well. The church teaches that in hard times, a person's first duty is to solve his or her own problems and then ask for help from the extended family. Failing that, however, a bishop may provide him or her with cash or coupons redeemable at the 100 bishops' storehouse depots, with their Deseret-brand bounty. The largesse is not infinite: the system also includes 97 employment centers, and Mormon welfare officials report that a recipient generally stays on the dole between 10 and 12 weeks, at an average total cash value of \$300. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the system is its funding, which does not, as one might expect, come out of tithes. Rather, once a month, church members are asked to go without two meals and contribute their value to the welfare system. The fast money is maintained and administered locally, so that each community can

nd the U.S. ... It's the same problem faced by any multinational.??

Walking a Mile in Their Shoes

A lapsed Mormon takes a sentimental journey to the holy sites

By **WALTER KIRN**

THE BEST WAY TO REACH THE GARDEN OF EDEN, I FOUND, was to fly into Kansas City, Mo., rent a car and drive north on Interstate 35 for two hours, exiting at a town named Cameron and following the signs to Adam-ondi-Ahman. The place was marked on my atlas merely as a "Mormon shrine," but having grown up as a Mormon, I knew better. According to Joseph Smith, the farm-boy prophet who at 14 felt his first heavenly inklings and by 30 had attracted thousands of followers, this was where God created humankind and where Christ would return to rule the earth.

I parked in a lot beside two other cars, both of which had Utah plates, and followed a path to a posted overlook. I had been here before, as a devout 14-year-old on a church-led bus tour. Now, a more skeptical adult, I wanted to follow the Mormon trail again, traveling (in the order of settlement) from Missouri, Joseph Smith's abortive Zion, back east to Nauvoo, Ill., the first true Mormon city, then west along the route of exile to Salt Lake

City, Utah. Preserving and highlighting the past is a Mormon priority—witness the re-enactment of the wagon train. Leaders of the church seem to understand that its vivid history, as much as its sometimes cloudy theology, is what attracts the potential convert.

Standing beside a clean-cut young couple dressed rather formally for the summer weather, I looked out over Adam's home, a broad green valley that is currently planted in corn. Smith planned a town here that never took hold, just one among several Mormon promised lands, from Kirtland, Ohio, to Independence, Mo., that he and his flock were violently driven from. The public did not like Mormons in those days (segments of it still don't) and charged them with a host of crimes ranging from fraternizing with native "savages" to advocating the abolition of slavery. Smith's early church was a radical institution. It preached communitarian economics, the brotherhood of man and polygamy. But perhaps Smith's deepest break from orthodoxy had to do with geography, not theology: he taught that the New Jerusalem was here, smack dab in the middle of America.

I drove east out of Eden across the Mississippi, reflecting that

perhaps Smith's prophecies were not so wacky after all. Even Mark Twain (a notorious Mormon mocker who famously dissed the *Book of Mormon* as "chloroform in print") set his own idyllic fables along the riverway. Indeed, if God *had* planted Eden in America, he could not have found better soil or growing weather. Even the air smells fertile in northern Missouri—humid, rich and fertile—almost malted.

In Nauvoo I stopped at the church-run visitors center, up the hill from the restored historic district. The place had changed since I had seen it as a kid. Installed below a towering statue of a decidedly muscular Christ were several video mon-

itors equipped with touch screens. Each screen had a menu of philosophical questions. I selected "What is the purpose of life?" although I was tempted to cut to the chase by touching "Is there life after death?" Instantly a robotic male voice answered, "To see if we will follow the plan of our Heavenly Father, each of us is given two great gifts. One is time, the other freedom of choice ... Every day, every hour, every minute of our span of mortal years must sometime be

accounted for." The screen showed a high school boy inside his car, a lurid, seductive neon sign reflected in its windshield. The pensive young man looked as though he had suddenly realized he had been wasting precious mortal minutes and had better drive home while there was still time.

I spent another half an hour at the screen, taking advantage of its forthright answers to a veritable maze of cosmic quandaries. As a teenager I had appreciated such certainties; as an adult I was tempted to make fun of them. My secular college professors had insisted that truth is always complicated, relative, but I still felt the tug of religious absolutism. Watching a woman in a wheelchair beside me earnestly punching up answers on her screen, I concluded I was not alone.

I toured what was left of old Nauvoo and learned that Smith had run his growing church from an office above his family's general store. I liked this detail. It brought the man alive for me. Unlike Brigham Young, the stern puritan who succeeded him, Smith was an improviser, a boyish mystic, brimming with charismatic, homegrown visions. In the fields beyond his store,



A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES Young women in period costume pull handcars during the re-enactment of the Mormon's great trek to "Zion"

LES STONE—SYGMA FOR TIME

he liked to dress up as a general and drill his personal army, the Nauvoo Legion. In 1844, the year he was murdered, he announced a quixotic candidacy for the U.S. presidency. All in all, it was as if Huck Finn had founded a major religion.

The frontier jail where Smith was killed lies southeast of Nauvoo, in Carthage, Ill. I arrived in the middle of a guided tour: 30 or 40 Mormon teens sat on the floor of a second-story room and listened to a husky, white-haired elder narrate the tragedy of Smith's last hours. The elder, using a walking stick to imitate the rifles of the mob, enacted the death scene with stagey gusto, but when the bloody climax came—Smith's disastrous fall from the building—he grew somber. "I personally think that when Joseph fell out that window, the Savior was right there to catch him." There were tears in his eyes now and more tears on the cheeks of the girl with corn-silk blond hair sitting beside him.

The elder went on to point out two bullet holes in a nearby door, which led to several questions from the kids about the circumstances of the assassination. Did Joseph speak any last words? Wasn't there once a bloodstain on the floor? These kids had seen too many action movies, I sensed, but I could not fault them for their curiosity. Like early Christians eager to handle pieces of the Cross, the kids desired a physical connection with this obscure Midwestern passion play, which was not unlike a 19th century Waco. I felt the same curiosity at their age—intrigued by an American faith that served up not only abstract precepts but also the chance to walk in the footsteps of its heroes.

After Smith's death and Young's rise to power, those footsteps led due west. Mormons like to compare themselves to Jews; they too had a strenuous exodus: across the Mississippi, into Iowa, through Nebraska and Wyoming, into Utah. For the past two years, a few hundred hardy souls have been retracing this journey on horseback and on foot. Many of the pilgrims are blood descendants of the pioneers, and although their re-creation of the procession includes a few dozen motorized support vehicles, the trek is not for the tenderfoot.

I joined up with the march in western Wyoming, near the ghost town of Piedmont. The wind blew gales of dust into people's faces. Some children were limping. The sun was high and hot. At the head of the party were scores of clattering wagons; to the rear, a long line of pedestrians pulling handcarts. Between the groups, a solitary woman, dressed in a bonnet and a long print dress, strode briskly along with her eyes on her tennis shoes.

Karen Hill had trudged almost a thousand miles since spring and had a hundred more to go. The wife of the trek's or-

ganizer, Brian Hill, Karen converted to Mormonism when she was 25. "Everyone has a different reason to be here," she said. Karen's was to support her husband. "What I didn't expect," she said, "was the exhaustion, physical and emotional. I think it was the same for the first saints." She recalled a song she had written miles back: "There are angels among us, there are angels about ... The veil is getting thinner now."

I dropped back a mile and joined the handcart company. Gordon Beharrell, an elderly Englishman, was carrying a fluttering Union Jack in tribute to his 19th century countrymen who had converted to Mormonism by the thousands and walked this route before him. "I intended to re-enact their adventure, but for me this hasn't been a re-enactment. I've experienced real hardship and real pain." Beharrell told an inspiring story then. Before setting out, he was found to have colon cancer and underwent major surgery. Then, as he neared Scott's Bluff, Neb., he fell ill from complications and was hos-

pitalized again. "When I was released, I could barely walk five yards. I had to be loaded on a cart and pulled. Then two elders gave me a healing blessing. The next Wednesday I managed to walk two miles, then six the next day, then 11 the next. Soon I was making 25 miles a day, and I've been going steady ever since. I attribute all this to a certain British grit, but mostly to the power of that blessing."

There were other sojourners with tales to tell. Earl Gillmore, sunbaked,

middle-aged and wearing a guitar across his back, had been homeless and unemployed when he set out. "I didn't have the money to do this, but somehow I knew I was supposed to be here. My whole walk has been on faith." Along the way, Gillmore was hired as camp cook and promised a job in Salt Lake City. "I finally know what it means," he said, "to endure to the end." Ted Moore, a Missouri gold miner, gave a more humorous testament of faith. He dug through the pots and pans in his handcart and pulled out a dusty "Pioneer" Barbie doll. "She's going the whole way with me," Moore said. "Every step that I take, Barbie takes."

A few hours before sundown, the wagon train made camp. I had walked only a few miles that day, but I was parched and exhausted. A meal was served. I sat in the dirt and devoured a plate of meat loaf, while around me devout believers watered horses, repaired bent wagon wheels, fed bottles to crying infants. In just a few days, to quote their ancestors, they would cross the mountains and be "safe in Zion." I could not help wishing them well. In their epic trek across Smith's American Eden, they have lost more paradises than they've found. ■



FAMILIES THAT PRAY TOGETHER "There are angels among us," a woman sang, "there are angels about ... The veil is getting thinner now"

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